

# **DECISION MEMO**

## **BLUE RIDGE WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA FOOD PLOT EXPANSION PROJECT**

**USDA Forest Service Southern Region, Chattahoochee National Forest, Toccoa Ranger District  
Lumpkin County, Georgia**

### **DECISION**

I have decided to approve a request by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources to expand an existing permanent wildlife opening (food plot) on the Blue Ridge Wildlife Management Area in Lumpkin County, Georgia.

An existing, old roadbed off of the Bull Mountain Road (FS road #83) that provides access to a small (<0.3 acre) food plot will be widened to create a linear wildlife opening. The existing road is approximately 0.4 miles in length and approximately 15 feet wide. It is located on a ridge top and the entire length of the road goes through an area that was clearcut in 1985. The northern portion is a mixed Virginia Pine, loblolly pine and white pine stand and the southern portion is a yellow poplar-oak stand. It will be expanded by a bulldozer to an average width of approximately 100 feet. The upper edge of the food plot will also be expanded. The small diameter trees that will be pushed down to expand the opening are not merchantable and will be piled and left on site. The total acreage of the linear opening and food plot will be approximately 4.5 acres upon completion.

The opening will be revegetated with a clover/grass seed mixture that is beneficial to wildlife. The planting will follow the Implementation Guidance for the Region 8 Invasive, Exotic Plant Species List and only native or non-invasive non-native species will be used. No species that is known or suspected to be invasive and persistent will be used. Prompt revegetation of all disturbed soils with desirable cover will minimize accidental introduction of non-native plant species.

### **PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION**

The purpose of the project is to enhance habitat conditions for both game and non-game wildlife species. High quality food plots are a very important habitat element for species such as white-tailed deer, wild turkey, ruffed grouse, and numerous songbirds, raptors, and small mammals. However, they comprise a very small portion (0.2 percent) of the landscape of the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests. The project will address the Forest Plan goal to provide a diversity of habitat for the full range of native and other desired species (Goal 2).

The land area to be treated for this project is located along a ridgetop; no stream channels or riparian corridors exist within the boundaries to be cleared. There is a small stream below the existing opening but the opening will only be expanded on the upper side, outside of the riparian corridor. Forest plan standards related to soil disturbance and revegetation will be implemented to

minimize soil movement from the project, with appropriate erosion control measures installed during clearing and prompt revegetation to re-establish ground cover.

### **CATEGORY**

This action does not individually or cumulatively have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment, and therefore, is categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement (EIS) or an environmental assessment (EA). The specific category, identified in Forest Service Handbook 1909.15 “Environmental Policy and Procedures” is Section 31.2 Category 6: *“Timber stand and/or wildlife habitat improvement activities which do not include the use of herbicides or do not require more than one mile of low standard road construction.”*

### **NO EXTRAORDINARY CIRCUMSTANCES EXIST**

The District interdisciplinary team screened these actions for the presence of any one of the extraordinary circumstances identified in Forest Service Handbook 1909.15, Section 30.3 paragraph 2. The team determined that there are no extraordinary circumstances existing that may cause the projects to have significant effects. Therefore, neither an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) nor an Environmental Assessment (EA) will be required. Specifically:

- There are no known federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, or species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat present within the project area. The Federally listed Etowah Darter is known to occur approximately 3.5 miles downstream of the project area. However, Forest-wide water quality standards will be followed on this project to maintain water quality and prevent adverse impacts to aquatic species. In addition, all ground disturbances will occur on ridgetop sites and no activities will occur within the riparian corridor. Therefore, there will be no impact to any federally listed species and the project will not adversely impact any Forest Service Sensitive species (See Biological Evaluation in the project file).
- No flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds will be affected by this project.
- The project is not within any congressionally designated areas, such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas.
- The project is not within any inventoried roadless areas.
- The project is not within any Research Natural Areas.
- There are no known American Indians and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites within the project area (see Cultural Resource Report in project folder).
- There are no known Archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas within the project area (see Cultural Resource Report in project folder).

## **PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

A scoping letter was sent to the district list of interested parties on September 7, 2006. In addition, a 'Request for Comments' was published in The News Observer on September 12, 2006. The purpose of scoping was to determine the issues and concerns related to the proposal. Five scoping responses were received on these projects. The comments received were used to refine the projects and analysis. They were also used to explore the possibility of extraordinary circumstances and potential effects to those resources. Scoping, both internally and externally raised no concerns that were determined to be extraordinary circumstances (See project file).

## **FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS**

Forest Plan Consistency – The actions in this decision are consistent with the Forest Plan of the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests. The project is located in Management Prescription 9.H. (*Management, Maintenance, and Restoration of Plant Associations to their Ecological Potential*) which permits the expansion of existing permanent openings and the creation of new openings.

Endangered Species – Implementing the actions in this decision will not adversely affect threatened or endangered species, or result in loss of any other species' viability, or create significant trends towards Federal listing of the species under the Endangered Species Act.

Cultural Resources – The actions in this decision will not adversely affect any sites listed, or eligible for listing, in the National Register of Historic Places, nor will they cause the loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural or historic resources.

State approved Best Management Practices (BMP's) will be met and this project will comply with the Clean Water Act.

## **IMPLEMENTATION DATE**

If no appeal is received, implementation of this decision may occur on, but not before 5 business days from the close of the appeal filing period. If an appeal is received, implementation may not occur for 15 days following the date of appeal disposition. This work will occur in sometime during 2007 or 2008.

## **APPEAL OPPORTUNITIES**

This decision is subject to appeal, pursuant to 36 CFR 215.11 by those who provided comments or otherwise expressed interest in this particular proposal during the 30-day public comment

period. Written Notice of Appeal of this decision must be fully consistent with 36 CFR 215.14, "Content of Notice of Appeal", including the reasons for appeal. Appeals must be postmarked or received in duplicate within 45 days after the legal notice publication date in The News Observer. The appeal should be sent to: Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests, ATTN: Appeals Deciding Officer, 1775 Cleveland Highway, Gainesville, Georgia 30501.

### **CONTACT PERSON**

For further information about this project contact Jim Wentworth, Brasstown Ranger District, P. O. Box 9, Blairsville, GA 30514, or by telephone at 706-745-6928 ext.107 or e-mail at [jwentworth@fs.fed.us](mailto:jwentworth@fs.fed.us)

### **RESPONSIBLE OFFICIAL**

/s/ Alan Polk

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3/21/07

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ALAN POLK  
District Ranger  
Brasstown Ranger District

DATE: